



Belmont House - early 2000s. Photo: Herb Taylor

In search of fish in the basement . . .

By Fred Kimball Graham

Not long ago, the Toronto Star published a full-page history of Belmont House, the red brick residence belonging to the late Samuel Wilmot, the person who invented artificial fish breeding in the basement of his home, located on the “Old Kingston Road” (the original route between Fort Henry in Kingston and Fort York in Toronto) west of the Village of Newcastle.

The article bore the title “The Man with Fish in his Basement.” Samuel Wilmot was able to conduct his experiment due to an artesian well providing water flowing 24/7 through the basement of the house, with overflow piped out to the west-side garden, and thence down the slope to Wilmot Creek.

The property passed from the Samuel Wilmot to his daughter Minnie Galbraith and husband Duncan

Galbraith upon Wilmot’s death in 1899. The Galbraiths lived there until at least 1902, and sold it sometime after that to the Littlefields. In 1938, my grandfather, Frederick Graham, purchased the 300-acre estate for \$8000, but chose not to live there. Instead, he assigned my father, Alfred Walton Graham, to be the manager and on-site farmer, until the deed was transferred to Alfred in the early 1940s. In June 1945, Alf married Lena Kimball in the parsonage of the United Church on Mill Street in Newcastle, and together they managed the 15-room house, built a new barn, and tended crops and animals.

The dwelling was unusual in its day because it had a two-piece powder room on the main level, as well as two 3-piece washrooms on the second level adjacent to 5 bedrooms. Most of the living activity took place in the main kitchen, 28 feet by 14, where there was a table capable of seating a crowd of harvest helpers, and a cook stove that used wood by day and coal by night. The room



Belmont House early 1900s - note double posts on porch and wooden railing on upper balconies. Porch posts were altered by 1940, and upper railings removed.

was remarkable for its eight doorways, leading to other rooms in the residence. On the north side of that kitchen was what was formerly called “the summer kitchen,” consisting of two rooms (used by my father as tool storage space) and an attic room. In the basement was a cement rectangle where the ever-flowing water was visible, close to an octopus-like furnace, dependent on wood or coal according to season.

More recently, the property was acquired by developers Hannu Halminen and Brian Fenton, who undertook an extensive refurbishment with Manorville Homes acting as general contractor.



Alfred and Lena Graham (Fred's parents) sitting on one of the old mill stones in front of Belmont House, 1962.



Fred Graham, c1952 with family friend Gladys Whitney and her future husband, Russell Wiggins.

Due to its status as a historically designated building with cultural heritage value under the Ontario Heritage Act, the house could not be demolished or removed, and any renovations or alterations had to be approved by the municipality.

Manorville builds new homes but has also undertaken dozens of restorations since 1975, with Belmont being its largest and most complex to date.



The restored Belmont House, June 2025.

As the project neared completion, several members of the NVDHS were privileged take a guided tour in May 2025. What a surprise awaited us! Manorville's senior project manager J.J. MacLellan proved in short order that he had done meticulous research into the design, construction, modifications and future potential for the site. The passage of years had not been kind to the structure, which required extensive remedial reconstruction, but additionally, a new vision for the future was created.

The front door is the same as in 1898, but everything appeared fresh and new*. Not two bathrooms, but four. Not a 28-foot kitchen but a 56-foot kitchen-plus-Great Room with fireplace and elevated ceiling. Not an octopus furnace, but a wine cellar in the basement. And since the artesian well had been diverted during the preliminary work for the surrounding new subdivision, there is no longer flowing water in the basement, and not a fish in sight.

On a personal level, I had approached the tour with hesitancy, having experienced Belmont as my childhood home (1946-67) and suspicious of what might have been done to "my place." I need not have been concerned. The renovation is a triumph of modern design, comfort for living, alongside respect for the essence of what Belmont was always designed to be. You should see it for yourself.

"The Belmont House was there before there was a Canada—when it was just Upper Canada," he says. "It's part of the history of not just the community but the country."

~Larry Jamieson, Manorville Homes



Restored front hall, with original staircase and handrail

*Note: there are many original features of the home remaining such as the pine flooring, main staircase and railing, window locations and exterior brickwork and trim. Some of the elements such as the staircase were required to be retained as part of the heritage designation. Interior walls were all rebuilt – and some relocated, allowing for modern HVAC and plumbing systems.

A letter from Mrs. Duncan Galbraith



Mary (Minnie) Wilmot Galbraith was Samuel Wilmot's daughter, married to Duncan James Galbraith. They had taken over Belmont House and the farm after Samuel moved into the village prior to the fire that destroyed the original frame house in 1897. This letter was written to a Jack W.

February 26, 1899

On the 26th of last month we gave our house-warming. I sent out over a hundred invitations but there were only 60 here. Lots who were coming had grippe at the last minute. I tell you Jack I did not realize we had such a lovely home till we fixed it up for that party.

They danced in the empty rooms. We hired a man from Bowmanville to play the piano which was in the Hall. The large kitchen was made into a supper room & decorated. There was a card room upstairs where we used to sit & smoke (you + I). I only wish you + Kate had been here to help us. We feasted for days after.

Julie had come up 3 days beforehand to help me – it was to have been Lizzie, but the grippe made her a wreck. She did reach the point of making the trifles & they were good. Well, everyone raved for weeks about that party – the grand supper, how beautifully the house was lit up with electric lights, last but not least dear old Dad came up in his evening suit looking so aristocratic & nice, though a little shaky, staying till 3 a.m.

The day before the party, Olive sent the most exquisite flowers – 2 doz. glorious pink roses, 6 doz. immense carnations, 2 doz. mignonette & heaps of lovely green – the admiration of everyone. And now I have told you of our party which was a huge success. I feel we have entertained to last a couple of years.

**Notes: we're not sure who "Jack and Kate" were. Lizzie and Julie were Minnie's cousins Elizabeth Adelaide Wilmot, and Julia Wilmot, daughters of Samuel's brother Colonel Alan Wilmot. Olive is Minnie's sister, Olive Wilmot Sandford, and "dear old Dad" is her father, Samuel Wilmot, who died 3 months after the party, on May 17, 1899.*

Newcastle Merchants win 1958 Provincial Championship

By Myno Van Dyke

For many years, baseball was a very big deal in Newcastle. It was certainly big on September 20, 1958. The Newcastle Merchants Juvenile Baseball Club travelled to New Hamburg, Ontario, near Kitchener, for the second game of the Ontario Baseball Association playoffs. A few weeks earlier, the Newcastle boys had defeated a team from Alliston in two straight games to win the semi-finals. Then, they went on to play New Hamburg and won the first game of the finals. Two weeks later, (best two out of three) they played against the same New Hamburg team.

Ted (Kelly) Lane from Newtonville was their ace pitcher with Newcastle's Dave McCullough catching. Lane had 11 strikeouts. Gary McCullough was the top hitter for Newcastle going 3 for 4 with Dave Werry going 4 for 6. Lane pitched a no hit, no run game for four innings and struck out eleven batters. The backup pitcher was Eric Carleton. The Newcastle team held on to win 9-6 and clinch the Ontario "C" Championship.

At 10 p.m. that night the Ontario Provincial Police met the team at the Mill Street and 401 exit and escorted the team into Newcastle with siren and lights. A large contingent of fans, family and well wishers were there to greet them as well as the Newcastle Reeve, D.J. Cunningham. Newcastle Fire Department members Harold Couch and Earl Foster



Top Row- l to r- Walter Gibson, Jim Dean, Eric Carleton, Mort Lake, Charles Crowther, Dave Werry, Milt Rainey. Middle Row- Ted Lane, Charlie Trim, Dave McCullough, Paul McCullough, Brian Rowe. Bottom Row- Harold Couch (driver) Bob Westheuser, Gary McCullough, Doug Walton (Coach), Pete McCullough (bat-boy), Irv McCullough (Manager). Missing from photo John Sinclair.

got out their old antique fire truck and paraded them through the village.

The players on the Merchant's team were Newcastle's Walter Gibson, Charles Crowther, Brian Rowe, David Werry, John Sinclair, Gary McCullough, Dave McCullough, Paul McCullough and Peter McCullough was the bat boy. Eric Carleton, Jim Dean and Milt Rainey from Orono; Charlie Trim and Robert Westheuser were from Starkville and Ted Lane from Newtonville. The Manager was Irv McCullough (father of team members Gary, Dave, Paul and young Peter (the bat boy) and the Coach was Newcastle's Doug Walton.

Starkville's 18-year-old Charlie Trim was a member of the team and he recalled that a few weeks after they won the Championship, local people including Sandy Graham, Vic Garrod and Murray Paterson organized a trip for the team to New York City to see the New York Yankees play in the

World Series. All the expenses were covered by local businesses and residents.

They quickly got four or five cars together and headed to New York. They stayed at the New York Athletic Club in Manhattan, which according to Charlie was a very “high end” place to stay. They were able to attend two games. After one of the games, Charlie and Gary McCullough jumped down from the seats onto the outfield and ran as fast as they could for home plate. They expected someone would be chasing them off the field, but Charlie said there was no one bothering them and they quickly headed for the exit. Dave McCullough said that what he recalled about the stadium was, “Near the end of the game the beer was running down the stairs everywhere you looked.”

In October 1958, the Yankees easily won the World Series against the Milwaukee Braves with great players like Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra and management by Casey Stengel. It was an exciting time for the players but also very special for the fans. Walter Gibson, who was 15 at

the time, said he will never forget the game they attended on October 4, 1958. It was Game 3 of the World Series and Yankees pitcher Don Larsen threw 7 shutout innings ensuring a 4-0 win for the Yankees.

What Mort Lake remembered most was that there were many New York fans that brought their lunch to the game. One of the fans sitting next to Mort yelled “Come On!” and threw an orange hitting one of the players.

Charlie said that as young men they were very thankful how the community of Newcastle treated them. “Every time I come to Newcastle I think about the time that the fire truck drove us around the village. Dave McCullough said that “even though it was late at night, people were standing by the streets, almost in their underwear waving and celebrating with us”.

Now, 67 years later, many of the team members are still living in the area and contributing to their community. Seeds were planted.

Local Heroes – Part 5

By Brian Wilson & Paddy Duncan

We continue this series with this question: Can the residents of a small village community make a significant, positive contribution to the world? We think they can - consider this quartet of Newcastle and district residents.

Joseph E. Atkinson

“Nobody can escape his beginnings. And I despise the man who is untrue to them” ~Joseph E. Atkinson

On June 16, 1866, a Newcastle man named John Atkinson was walking along the Grand Trunk Railway tracks. Hard of hearing, he didn't hear the approaching train and was struck and killed, leaving behind his wife Hannah and eight children including six-month-old Joseph. To support



Joseph Atkinson's now-demolished birthplace on Golf Course Rd., Newcastle, c1940.

her family, Joseph's mother Hannah moved to a house at 44 King Ave. E. in Newcastle where she ran a boarding house, offering room and board to Massey Foundry labourers and workers from the woollen mill on Toronto St.

Atkinson's early life was difficult, which no doubt led to his later social activism. His mother died just before his 14th birthday.



Joseph took a job at the Durham Woollen Manufacturing Company on Toronto St., until it burned down in 1880. He survived on public charity for a while, and by 16 he was working at the Newcastle post office as a clerk. He took to signing his name “Joseph E. Atkinson” even though his parents had given him no middle name.

Looking for a better job two years later, he'd hoped to become a banker, but he heard about a job at *The Port Hope Times*. He was hired to collect accounts, but his responsibilities grew to include office management, reporting and editorial writing.

“I did not have the faintest intention of becoming a newspaperman when I accepted this job,” Atkinson later recalled. “I wanted to be a banker. But six dollars a week was too good to turn down.”

Port Hope Times publisher John B. Trayes was preoccupied with a political career, and the paper's creditors offered Atkinson the opportunity to buy it at the age of 20. He refused and when he was denied a raise the following year, he left for a job in Toronto. (*The Port Hope Times* continued publishing for another 42 years)

In October 1888, Atkinson got a job at *The Toronto World*, and then, a few months later at *The Globe* (one of the newspapers which would become *The Globe and Mail*). At first, he covered provincial politics at Queen's Park but by 1891, he was the *Globe's* Ottawa correspondent, covering parliament for the next five years. He became the managing editor of the *Montreal Herald* in 1897.

Atkinson married fellow *Globe* staffer Elmina Elliot in 1892. Elmina wrote for the women's pages of the *Montreal Herald* and the *Toronto Daily Star* under the pen name Madge Merton.

In 1899, Atkinson was offered the managing editor position at the *Montreal Star*, then the largest English-language newspaper in Canada. He had developed liberal beliefs, and the *Montreal Star* had a conservative viewpoint. He was tempted, because of the prestige of the position, but while considering the offer, in December 1899, Atkinson was asked by group of supporters of Wilfrid Laurier, the then Liberal prime minister of Canada, if he would become publisher of the *Toronto Evening Star*.

The group included Senator George Cox, Sir William Mulock (postmaster general), Peter Charles Larkin,, Timothy Eaton (Eaton's department store), William Christie (biscuit and cookie maker) and Walter Edward Hart Massey, son of Hart Massey and grandson of Daniel Massey, founder of Massey Harris/Massey Ferguson. Walter was president of Massey Harris at the time, but also born in Newcastle, a year before Atkinson. They both had attended the Newcastle Methodist Church on Mill St.

This group wanted the paper run as the voice of the Liberal Party. Atkinson refused their offer under those conditions and insisted on being given full control of newspaper policy and permission to run *The Star* in the best interests of the paper, not the Liberal Party. Atkinson successfully enlisted Laurier's support for his position. Laurier had known Atkinson as a Parliamentary reporter.

Atkinson also insisted that 40 percent of his salary be paid in stock and that he be given the opportunity to become majority owner. Although opposed at first, the group finally accepted Atkinson's terms.

When he accepted the job, the *Toronto Evening Star* was



Atkinson at his first desk at the *Star* in 1900.

a failing newspaper in a crowded market, competing in a conservative city with six other dailies and less than 210,000 citizens. Atkinson succeeded not only in turning the paper (renamed *The Toronto Daily Star* in 1900) around, but by 1909, it had the largest circulation of any Toronto paper and was only surpassed nationally by *La Presse* and the *Montreal Star*. (In 2015 it was officially declared Canada's highest circulation newspaper, though by then it had occupied that spot for many years).

In a biography of Atkinson, author Ross Harkness surmises that the *Star's* rapid ascent was because the paper "reflected the hopes, the yearnings and the aspirations of the common man. It reported the events that affected his life in language he understood." The other dailies appealed to Toronto's then-dominant and often better-off conservative Protestant culture, while Atkinson made the *Star* into the voice of Toronto's growing minorities, and the city's wage-earners and the poor. He believed that ordinary people needed a champion. In a speech at the University of Toronto in 1901, he declared that "the paper which is most human will in the end be found to have the most influence."

Around the turn of the century, Atkinson's wife, Elmina, suggested the Fresh Air Fund, allowing *Star* readers to donate money to send children on excursions and to summer camps. For 5 years, in the 1930s Copper Beech, originally built by Charles Clarke in 1820, on what is now Park Lane in Bond Head, hosted campers from Toronto at a summer camp every summer; they were funded in a large part by the Fresh Air Fund.

Campers enjoyed "a roomy old house with 5 acres of ground and two portable sleeping shacks." (After the camp closed in 1938, the building fell into disrepair and



was torn down in the early 1940s, replaced by a summer cottage) The Fresh Air Fund continues to this day.

Atkinson's lifelong Methodist faith informed his beliefs; from supporting censorship of morally dubious cultural works, to promoting temperance. (During his lifetime, the *Star* never accepted advertising for alcohol) His beliefs, and the stridency with which he pursued them in the newspaper earned Atkinson the nickname "Holy Joe." He was described by Canadian journalist and historian Mark Bourrie as a "strange mixture of social justice advocate and soul-crushing capitalist" and "a scolding, arch-capitalist Marxist who ran the Toronto Star as a cash machine for social justice movements."



Joseph Atkinson in 1928 with wife Elmina.



Joseph Atkinson c1922 with son (Arthur) Joseph Storey Atkinson

Joseph Atkinson was a tireless, lifelong crusader on the *Star's* editorial pages for unemployment insurance, old age pensions, government health insurance, minimum wage, public welfare, workers' compensation, and industrial safety legislation, so much so, that the Hon. T. C. "Tommy" Douglas later referred to Atkinson as "the father of the Canadian social safety net." He chaired a Liberal Party advisory committee on health and social reform legislation in 1916, influencing the party platforms during its 1919 convention. Following World War 1, he supported the Winnipeg General strike and supported the creation of a provincial hydro utility, the Toronto Transit Commission and the United Church of Canada.

The paper's weekend magazine, *The Toronto Star Weekly*, became a successful stand-alone publication, and aided by his son-in-law and managing editor, Harry C. Hindmarsh, Atkinson poured money into reporting to score stories.

When the German aircraft *Bremen* completed the first east-west transatlantic flight in 1928, crash-landing on the remote Greenly Island in the St. Lawrence, they hired a special train to get the reporters to Quebec, where a bush pilot would be returning from the Island with photos of the event.

The *Star* paid \$7,000 for the photos and the newspaper then hired another plane and a train to get the film to Montreal for developing and printing, and then a taxi (which drove through a blizzard) to get the prints to

Toronto. Their remarkable (and expensive) efforts gave the *Star* a 24-hour head start on every other newspaper in the world.

The philosophies that guided the *Star* became known as the Atkinson Principles, which are usually summarized as support for a strong united and independent Canada,, social justice, individual and civil liberties, community and civic engagement, the rights of working people and the necessary role of government.

During the 1930s and 1940s Atkinson continued to be influential beyond the pages of the newspaper, helping to dictate the terms that ended the General Motors strike in Oshawa in 1937, much to the chagrin of *Globe and Mail* owner and bitter rival George McCullagh, who had worked with Premier Mitch Hepburn in an attempt to break the strike. Atkinson also convinced William Lyon Mackenzie King to introduce family allowances in the 1944 throne speech.

His influence was so great that upon his death, Prime Minister King penned a tribute to Atkinson that was published in the *Star*. In the article, King called Atkinson a “great journalist, a zealous reformer and a true Canadian.”

Continuing to run the *Star* until his death on May 8, 1948, at the age of 82, Atkinson willed his controlling interest in the Toronto *Star* to the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. The foundation had been established in



Atkinson makes the first transatlantic commercial phone call in 1927

1942, with the intention that the profits from the newspaper would be distributed to organizations that promoted social and public reform, subsidiary to the newspaper’s public service functions of disseminating news and opinions.

Atkinson’s political and business enemies pounced – seeing an opportunity to silence or at least hamper an entity that had been a thorn in their sides for decades. George McCullagh expanded his newspaper empire by purchased the *Telegram* in November 1948, boasting to *Maclean’s* that he was going to “knock that pedagogic rag right off its pedestal.” (he did not – he died in 1952, at the age of 47, and the *Star* went on to become the most popular newspaper in Canada.)

Meanwhile, the provincial government under the leadership of Leslie Frost introduced the Charitable Gifts Act in 1949, which prohibited charities (other than religious charities) from owning more than 10% of the capital stock of a business.

It was an act aimed squarely at the *Star* and the Atkinson Foundation – and widely believed to be the work of former premier George Drew and George McCullagh. It was criticized across Ontario in most newspapers



Joseph Atkinson with his great-granddaughter in 1946.



1940s unlabelled photo from the Toronto Archives which appears to show Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (L) with Joseph E. Atkinson (R).

regardless of their political affiliation, as an attempt to silence opposition to the Conservative government.

After many years of legal wrangling, five of the foundation's trustees and four senior executives formed a new holding company and purchased the newspaper for \$25.5M. The deal established the structure of five controlling families who would run the company which evolved into Torstar, until its purchase by Nordstar Capital in 2020.

The *Star's* legacy of being "a paper for the people" did not end with Atkinson's death. Following the nine-year tenure at the helm of son-in-law Harry C. Hindmarsh, his son Joseph Story Atkinson became president of the



Joseph Atkinson's home at 44 King Ave. E., in Newcastle from 1866-1884. It now has new(er) siding and a front porch, but the structure is largely unchanged.

Star in 1957. He told employees the paper had been part of his life for as long as he could remember.

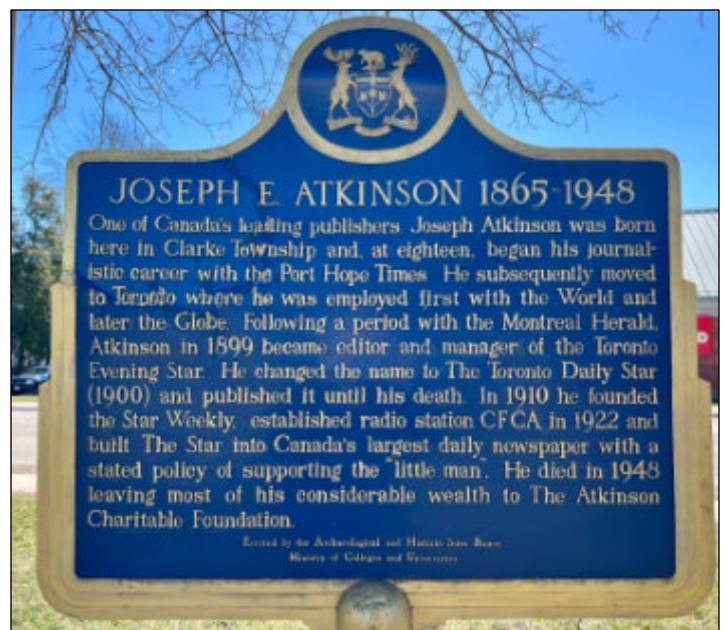
"From its inception in 1892, the Star has been a champion of social and economic reform, a defender of minority rights, a foe of discrimination, a friend of organized labour and a staunch advocate of Canadian nationhood," Atkinson said.

"We shall continue to support these principles with all the vigour at our command," Atkinson promised."

His father would no doubt have been proud.

Despite leaving the village for an extraordinary career, Atkinson remembered his Newcastle roots, donating an 80-foot wooden flagpole (originally a schooner mast) to the new Community Hall in 1923. And Newcastle hadn't forgotten him, either; in 1973, in an effort begun by former reeve and local councillor Cecil Carveth, a historical plaque in his honour was installed at the Community Hall. In 2012, the portion of Memorial Park around the library was renamed Joseph Atkinson Memorial Parkette and the plaque was moved there.

And while none of the Atkinson family are now involved in running the Toronto Star, since the departure of former business partner Paul Rivett in 2022, Torstar owner Jordan Bitove has emphasized the role of the Star as a civic institution and adherence to the Atkinson Principles. Holy Joe's legacy lives on, both in the many social and economic initiatives that were adopted in Canada because of his support, and through the work of his foundation and the continuing advocacy of his newspaper.



The commemorative plaque for Joseph Atkinson on King Ave. E. in the Joseph Atkinson Memorial Parkette, by the Newcastle branch of the Clarington Library.

NVDHS in action...potlucks...fairs...festivals - oh my!



Happy 90th Birthday, Erla!



A huge thank you to our generous donors!



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Mark your calendars!

NVDHS General Meeting - Wednesday, October 22, 2025, 7 p.m.
Newcastle Community Hall

Belmont House Then and Now

Fred Kimball Graham & J.J. MacLellan

What it was like to live in Samuel Wilmot's Belmont House in the mid-20th century?
And how DO you renovate a unique and important heritage home?

Come and find out - free admission & refreshments



Newcastle Village and District Historical Society

The Newcastle Village and District Historical Society was formed by a group of citizens in 1981 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the former Village of Newcastle and its immediate environs. Today, we have an extensive collection of artifacts, documents and photographs and offer help with research into the history of the area, including its businesses and families.

We are located in the former public library in the Newcastle Community Hall. We have permanent and special displays in the historical room and are open to the public twice a week. We are a registered charity, supported by our members, local sponsors and donors, with some additional assistance from the Town of

Clarington and the Government of Canada (Canada Summer Jobs). We welcome all new members and donors!

20 King Avenue, Unit 3, Newcastle, Ontario, L1B 1H7

Open: Tuesdays & Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to noon

Website: newcastlehistorical.ca
Email: info@newcastlehistorical.ca

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